



Paducah Sgt.
George Johnson

ABBIE DARST | PROGRAM COORDINATOR

After a 17 year-long career in law enforcement — 10 of those with Paducah Police — Sgt. George Johnson has learned a lot about what truly matters in police work. His experience has taught him how to make both himself and his fellow officers happy and productive, as they strive to offer their community the impeccable service it deserves. Johnson, who moved to Paducah when he was only four years old, has a strong connection to the city where his entire family still resides. In his roles as a crisis negotiator, special events coordinator, crime stoppers guru and photographer, Johnson serves his agency with fervor and passion. He is married and has a 12-year-old daughter and three teen-age step children.

I went and stayed with my grandmother when I came home on weekends from the academy. She was probably my moral compass in the beginning. I'd come home and tell her stories and whatnot, and she was always the one who said, 'You know the difference between right and wrong and you know how you're supposed to act. And I will un-invite you to Christmas if you become a jerk. Mind your Ps and Qs and we'll be friends and you'll be on my good list,' she said. 'If you get out and become an ass, then forget it. All deals are off.'

I looked around and I would see pictures in other magazines or publications and I would see nice backdrops and officers dressed in their Class A uniforms, and they'd look proud. And I would look at our ID cards and we would look like we had mug shots made. What I wanted most of all was for the officers here to have a sense of ownership in this police department. They are proud of their accomplishments and the agency they work for. I wanted them to be recognized some place, and taking and putting up professional photos was a good starting place. It ended up much better than I'd ever planned.

I like to photograph just about anything that catches my fancy, or is fun to shoot. I like to shoot the kids when they are playing. We go out to Colorado every year, and I shoot stuff up there. I'm creating a postcard set right now of some of the older buildings here in downtown Paducah. It takes my mind off everything else and it gives me something to spend my money on. I've always got a camera with me. I pack it around in the front

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seat of my cruiser. If I see something, I'll roll down my window and snap a picture here and there.

Our Crisis Negotiation Team doesn't get called out that often — maybe two to three times a year we get called out as a team. But, using that skill set, that may happen any number of times in a year. It may not come to the point where I have to call a team out, may be in a less formal way, just talking somebody down that's really, really wound up. We are trying to get voluntary compliance out of somebody. That can happen any time of day. That can happen with your 13 year old. You use that skill set all the time.

Our crime stoppers program had been set up and run the same way for years. They had an answering machine and if it was called after 5 p.m., the person had to leave a message on the answering machine. But, understandably, no one wanted to leave a message. If people want to be anonymous, they don't want their voice recorded. I understand the heart of the program is based in anonymity and we guarantee that. The program would be lost if the information ever was revealed on the call.

So, I made a pitch to the board and said if we want to be a successful program, and want to be a truly 24/7 program to this area, I think we have to make ourselves available in the best fashion that we can. Now, you can submit a tip online through the website. You can send a text message; you can call the phone number. We've paid out a ton of money and locked up a lot of bad guys because of it. I'm very proud of the program.

I've been working in special events forever. I had been in Paducah about a year or two when they had an opening for a community liaison officer. They were putting forth a revitalization effort in the lower town arts district and wanted someone to cover that area. My family had a shoe store downtown. My grandmother is 88, and has worked there every day since 1977. So, I had grown up in that area and spent a lot of my summers down there.

The downtown district needed to know a face and needed to know a name to go with that face. So, I typed up a letter and put my picture in the corner of it and I went business to business. I shook a hand and gave them a letter that had my contact information on it. I told them I'd be down there for the next six months and to call me if they had questions. That six months turned into 18 months. I'm a firm believer that if a department wants to be successful, they have to put a face out there to address issues. I couldn't fix everything. But, if I couldn't fix it, or get an answer to it, then I found somebody who could fix it or give them the answer. I tried not to leave any problems or issues unaddressed.

I really like the sergeant's position. I thought at one point that my goal was to be a captain. But I will get out and work the road in a heartbeat. I like to be out doing the job that I did for so long. I'm reviewing the reports, it doesn't hurt me a bit to go out and do one every once in a while. I love to go get paid to go patrol. It's fun. I still love my job. I love being a police officer.

I love it on the weekends when I'm the only one here. The department pretty much belongs to me, and I know I have to answer for it if I mess it up. But when I'm here on a weekend by myself, it's pretty neat. I'm responsible for the whole city. And that might sound kind of cheesy, but it's a good feeling that they trust me enough to leave the whole city of Paducah in my hands.

I like seeing these younger officers come in the door and watching them. They kind of renew the spirit of police work when they come through. I hope at least a couple of these guys, when they talk about me, say, 'Well, he was a good sergeant. He was there,' or take something away. Being here every day, I hope I leave some kind of legacy behind. I love this department and the guys who work here — I think the world of them. And I hope that I'm not doing it for nothing.

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